

# Analysis of Dance Forms and Cultural Factors of the Northern Dynasties in China

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**Abstract:** *The Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties constituted a crucial period in the progress of ancient Chinese music and dance. The dances of Shengle and Pingcheng among the Northern Wei clearly highlight the grassland nomadic culture. In Luoyang, the Sinicization, led by Emperor Xiaowen, resulted in the blending of dance cultures of the Hu and the Han people. Since the Eastern and Western Wei, Northern Qi, and Northern Zhou Dynasties, the cultural dance factors that had intermingled in earlier periods accreted and were integrated; these were prominently reflected in the dances of Yecheng and Chang'an. During the Northern Dynasties, interactions between dance cultures of various ethnic groups resulted in the traditional Liyue civilization of China absorbing new forms and content and activating energetic elements in the Chinese traditional dance. This laid the foundation of Sui and Tang music and dance, representing the formation of a new art era.*

**Keywords:** *dance, cultural factors, the Northern Dynasties*

## 1. Introduction

During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, ancient Chinese music and dance changed dramatically, particularly in the Northern Dynasties. Under the dominion of the Northern Dynasties' regimes established by the Xianbei people, the grassland culture from the north, the Sanyan and the Goguryeo cultures from the northeast, the Hexi culture, and the cultures of various ethnic groups from the Western Regions intermingled in the farming areas of the Central Plains, which were dominated by the Han people.

As a result of extensive dialogue and interactions between the dance cultures of various ethnic groups, the traditional Liyue (ritual and music) civilization of China absorbed new forms and content and incorporated energetic elements into the Chinese traditional dance to create new forms, thus laying the foundation for the prosperity of Sui and Tang music and dance.

The Northern Dynasties inherited the customs of lavish burials dating back to the Han Dynasty that emphasized "to serve them now dead as if they were living." Furthermore, since the Han-Wei period, there has been a certain degree of overlap in the content of Liyue and secular music so that the dance forms on the grave relics of the Northern Dynasties reflect, to a certain extent, the general attributes of dances at that time. The Northern Dynasties consisted of the Northern, Eastern and Western Wei, along with the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou. The capitals of these five dynasties were Shengle, Pingcheng, Luoyang, Yecheng, and Chang'an. The five capitals were not only places where the music and dance of the Northern Dynasties flourished but also the sites of many tombs.

## 2. Shengle and Pingcheng of the Northern Wei Dynasty

At the beginning of 386 AD, Tuoba Gui established the Northern Wei Dynasty in Niuchuan. Soon after, he moved the capital to Shengle (now northwest of Horing County of Inner Mongolia). In July 398 AD, Tuoba Gui moved the capital again to Pingcheng (now Datong, Shanxi). In 494 AD, Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei moved the capital to Luoyang. Before this move, politically speaking, the Hu and the Han people ruled the country together; economically, both agriculture and animal husbandry were practiced; and culturally, the Hu's trends and the Han's customs mixed and mingled. Meanwhile, the culture of Xianbei dominated the field of dance.

Although few dance relics of the Northern Wei Dynasty have been found in Shengle, the first capital of the Dynasty, one of the most iconic pieces is a music and dance scene in a mural of a brick tomb in Sandaoying Township that was built around 480 AD (Large Mural Brick Tomb 1993, 61). Some scholars,

like Liu Enbo (2010, 181), believe that the drawing depicts the sacrificial rituals in the ancestral temples of the Xianbei people. Two dancers are depicted in front of the building on the right side of the drawing. The dancer on the left wears a white, wide-sleeved shirt and a red skirt. The right arm is stretched out to the side, while the left arm is bent across the chest. The dancer on the right wears a red, wide-sleeved shirt and a white skirt, with arms stretched out on both sides and slightly raised like a bird in flight. The two dancers face each other without obvious lower limb movements and seem to be walking in small steps.

The movements of the dancer on the right in the drawing are similar to those of a dancer sculpture dated 398 AD, which was discovered in a tomb in Hohhot, 40 kilometers north of the ancient city of Shengle (Guo 1977, 38-41). The sculpture wears a hood and a long, floor-sweeping robe with narrow sleeves. It stands upright and stretches its arms to the sides, and the elbows and wrists are bent in a wave shape, which seems to imitate a bird flapping its wings. Given these features, it could be said that it loosely resembles the flexible arm movements in contemporary Mongolian dance.

From the similarity of the dance moves depicted by these two relics, it can be inferred that this kind of dance with arms stretched to both sides was a traditional dance move of the Xianbei ethnic group at the time. The movement might originate from the nomadic worship of bird totems. According to *The Book of Wei: Treatise on Official Ranks*, the titles of high-ranking officials included names of birds such as “little egret” and “Eurasian teal” (S. Wei 2000, 1981). Additionally, there were numerous images of birds in the tomb murals of the Northern Wei, which reveals that the Xianbei ethnic group worshiped bird totems. If we look at the timeline, the dancer sculpture in Hohhot dates back to the period when the Northern Wei had established the capital in Pingcheng, while the dancing image in Horinger dates more than a decade before the Northern Wei moved the capital to Luoyang; the relics were made more than 20 years apart. During this time period, the stable inheritance of the dance indicates the strong position of Xianbei culture. The historical records also mentioned that “the vehicles and formal attire were mostly made with reference to the Hu style” (Z. Wei 2000, 173), and “Qingshang music was not circulated among the local areas, and the people followed their respective habits” (Z. Liu 2000, 701), which is consistent with this phenomenon.

The relics related to dance culture in Pingcheng are mostly murals, while the grassland style is strong in the dance moves. Two relics serve as typical examples. The first is a dance of four people in the drawing of a banquet discovered on the south wall in tomb No. M7 of the Mural Tomb in Shaling. The dance is performed in the setting of an outdoor banquet and the dancers are surrounded by nomads' yurts. The four dancers are lined up in a row and dance in the center of the banqueting venue. Each dancer stands upright on one leg, with one knee lifted up, as if performing *retir é* moves and small jumps. As the mural was severely damaged, it is unclear whether they are dancing with their arms linked together or separately. The dancer on the far left raises their right hand diagonally into the air, while the dancer on the far right stretches the left arm diagonally toward the earth, with his torso slightly leaning toward the front-right. The atmosphere in the scene is lively. The second artifact depicts the dance of four people in another drawing of a banquet found on the north wall in tomb No. M9 of the Northern Wei Tomb at Tongjiawan. All dancers wear pointed hats and tight clothes. Their torsos lean forward slightly, their arms spread out to the sides, palms tilted up, and the left leg stands straight with the right calves cocked back. There are also jugglers, pipa players, flute players, and paixiao players depicted at the bottom of the picture.

The two murals in different areas of Pingcheng depict dances with the same number of dancers, movements, formations, costumes, and performance occasions, suggesting that the dances are the same. Judging from the performance environment of the dancers in the drawing of the Mural Tomb at Shaling and the identity (from a branch of the Xianbei ethnic group) of the tomb owner, Lady Poduoluo, (Gao 2006, 4-24) the dance is believed to be a traditional Xianbei dance. Moreover, its dance form is similar to some dance postures and arrangements of modern folk dances such as “I K'an Wu” of the Evenki people, and “É Hu Lan Tê Hu Lan” of the Oroqen people. The Tuoba Tribe of Xianbei, founder of the Northern Wei Dynasty, originated in the territory of Oroqen Autonomous Banner, which is the settlement of the Evenki and the Oroqen people who traditionally engage in nomadic pastoralism and hunting. The Oroqen people have a tradition of raising reindeer, while “Xianbei means deer-tamer” (Du 2011, 14). Speculating from this, the folk dance moves of contemporary Evenki and Oroqen people may have inherited dance elements from the ancient Xianbei people. Furthermore, the Xianbei dances in the murals are probably identical to the modern dance forms “I K'an Wu” of the Evenki people and “É Hu Lan Tê Hu Lan” of the Oroqen people, which attach importance to the movements of jumping and stepping, as well as precision dance with linear formations.

Apart from this, in the Tomb of Song Shaozu of the Northern Wei, discovered in Datong, the music

and dance pictures found in the inner wall of the sarcophagus carry the style of Southern Dynasties and can be regarded as an isolated example in the tombs of the Northern Wei Dynasty in Pingcheng (J. Liu 2001, 19-39). Other dancing images include reliefs and sculptures of musicians in the Tomb of Sima Jinlong (Daton 1972, 20-33), linked-pearl motifs of child musicians in the Tomb of Qutu Longye (Gao 2019, 15-37), and coffin paintings in Northern Wei Tomb 1 at Hudong (Gao 2004, 26-34), which are mostly related to Buddhism and Central Asian culture. However, due to the drawing forms of sculptures and ornaments, the dance moves have undergone artistic transformation and cannot be restored and analyzed; therefore, they will not be discussed here.

### 3. Luoyang of the Northern Wei Dynasty

Around the time when Emperor Xiaowen moved the capital to Luoyang in 494 AD, he ordered large-scale Sinicization on the one hand, and strengthened exchanges with the Western Regions on the other hand. According to *“Temples and Monasteries in Luoyang,”* “from the Pamir Mountains to the west, as far as the boundary of Daqin (the Roman Empire), there were hundreds and thousands of countries and cities in between. All of their people would love to submit themselves to our country, while the Hu traders traveled between the capital and the borders every day” (Zhou, 2006, 91). From the dance images in the grave relics unearthed in Luoyang it can be seen that the style of the dance during this period was distinctly different from that of the Shengle and Pingcheng periods.

The most typical posture of dancer sculptures in this period is as follows: both feet kept straight; one arm drooped, the torso bent slightly toward the side of the arm; the upper arm raised to the side, the elbow bent, and the hand placed on the side between the chest and the waist (referred to as “Type A dance” in this article). The dancers usually wear red clothes with the right collar crossing over the left. This type of dancer sculpture was mainly found in the tombs of Lv Ren (532 AD) (Cheng 2011, 44-57), Wang Wen (532 AD) (Zhu and Li 1995, 26-35), Yang Ji (533 AD) (Shen 2007, 56-69), and the HM621 tomb (late Northern Wei) of the Northern Wei on Hengshan Road (Deng 2009, 41-46).

Basically, Type A dance had not appeared in the tombs before the Northern Wei Dynasty, but was found in many relics from the late Northern Wei Dynasty. In the grave relics of the Han Dynasty (thrifty burials were more prevalent in the Wei and Jin Dynasties; thus, fewer relics from these periods were unearthed), the predecessor of the Northern Wei, the images of single standing dancers mostly present imagery in which their upper limbs are spread out toward the infinite space above the horizontal level. For Type A dance in the Northern Wei, the drooping arm represents the natural posture of a person, while the bended arm, with the wrist and forearm retracted toward the chest and abdomen, squeezing the space in front of the body, and the elbow pointed outward, represents alienation from the outside world. The difference in the movements of the left and right arms of the dancers indicates a sense of internal conflict. On this basis, the squeezing of the space in front of the body reflects the introspection in Eastern religious philosophy.

It is impossible to create a new style of dance moves out of thin air. When tracing its origins, Type A dance of the Northern Wei is believed to be a new variety of the Karihasta movement from ancient India dance. Music and dance exchanges between China and India in ancient times have been recorded. For example, in the period of the Sixteen Kingdoms, Tianzhu contributed musicians to the *Qianliang* (one of the sixteen kingdoms in China between 304-439 AD) (Z. Wei 2000, 254). According to *“Natyashastra”* (The Theory of Dance), written by the Indian theatrologist Bharata in 600 BC, Karihasta is performed with “the latā hand held up and swung from side to side and the tripatāka hand held on the ear.” (Bharata 1951, 188). It is conceivable that when the arm of the Karihasta dancer that presents tripatāka has its position lowered, it becomes a Type A dance. The positions of the raised arm that presents the tripatāka movement are indeed flexible in ancient Indian sculptures that depict Karihasta. Karihasta movements can be seen in the relics that record the spread of Buddhism to the east, including the murals in Cave 98 of Kizil Caves, as well as Caves 148 and 445 of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang. This further illustrates the relationship between Type A dance and the religious culture of India.

Another typical posture of dancer sculptures in the Luoyang period is as follows: the left leg stands straight, the right leg is bent and raised, the torso leans forward slightly, facing down, and the hands are folded and touch the right knee. The dancers may be stepping forward or making small jumps (referred to as “Type B dance” in this study). This kind of dancer sculpture was mainly recovered from the Tombs of Ran Hua (527 AD) (Wang 1993, 414-425), Yuan Shao (528 AD) (Hung 1973, 218-224) and the HM621 tomb (late Northern Wei) of the Northern Wei on Hengshan Road (Deng 2009, 41-46). A dancer sculpture unearthed from the Tomb of Yang Ji also has the left leg standing straight and the right knee

raised. However, only the right hand is touching the knee, while the left hand holds the dress, and the head tilts to the left with a smile on the face (Shen 2007, 56-69). The movements of the sculpture are a variation of Type B dance.

The most obvious feature of Type B dance is that the position of the upper limbs is fixed and the movements of the lower limbs are accentuated. Like Type A dance, this dance did not appear until the Northern Wei Dynasty. Before that, although there are stepping or jumping movements in the murals and brick carvings from the Wei and Jin Dynasties and the Han Dynasty, most of the dancers used props. From the audience's point of view, the dance spaces are basically filled with flying scarves and sleeves or the sounds of trays and drums. In contrast, Type B dance of the Northern Wei reduces the display of upper limb movements and the use of props and emphasizes the movements of the lower limbs. This is believed to be a tradition in the dances of nomads. Additionally, as German dance scholar Curt Sachs (2014, 31) pointed out, for an ethnic group that "devoted more to totems and the system of chiefdom, more stretching dances will be adopted," that is, emphasizing lower limb movements.

The dances that reflect the nomads' worship of bird totems had been brought to Luoyang. A dancer sculpture unearthed from the Tomb of Yuan Zhi (529 AD), which stands upright with its arms extended diagonally downwards on both sides, wrists hooked inward, and fingers closed, is an example of such dances (Wu 2017, 3-26). Movements with arms stretched to both sides are strongly related to the aforementioned dance moves, including those identified in the dance images found in the mural tomb at Horiger, the dancer sculptures found in the Northern Wei Tomb at Hohhot, and the four dancers with outstretched arms in the mural of the Northern Wei Tomb at Tongjiawan, Datong. Inferring from the time continuity of the dance images in these relics, the dance traditions that reflect Xianbei's worship of bird totems continued to appear through the periods of Shengle, Pingcheng, and Luoyang of the Northern Wei Dynasty, spanning a period of more than 100 years with tenacious vitality. Additionally, another sculpture that depicts a female dancer, found in the Tomb of Lv Ren (532 AD), has its elbows bent close to the sides of the body, its hands placed next to the waist, and the whole body leaning slightly forward (Cheng 2011, 44-57). This dance move may be understood as the ready position for the aforementioned dance moves with open arms. The "Huo Feng Wu" (Dance of the Fire Phoenix) of the Luoyang period of the Northern Wei, recorded in "*Temples and Monasteries in Luoyang*," may also be related to such dances that worship bird totems (Zhou 2006, 129). Li Shangyin, poet of the Tang Dynasty, portrayed the movements of Huo Feng Wu as "waving a swan feather fan" (The Editorial Department 1999, 6244) in his poem, "*Jingkan* (Dressing Table)."

Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei conquered Shouchun of the Southern Dynasty in 500 AD, resulting in the assimilation of Qingshang music and dances such as the Wu Ballads in Jiangnan and the West Music in Jingchu (S. Wei 2000, 18). Therefore, the music and dances of the Southern Dynasty constituted a certain part of the culture in Luoyang at that time. For example, in the banquet mural on the south wall of the burial chamber of the Tomb of Wang Wen (532 AD), there are three female dancers who wear Y-shaped high buns and open collar clothes. The bands of their dresses touch the floor, and as both arms swing to the left, the bands also drift toward the same direction (Zhu and Li 1995, 26-35). The posture is identical to that described in Liu Shuo's "Songs to Bai Zhu Dancing" of the Southern Dynasty: "How decent are the gentle and slow moves... the bodies mirror the light breeze and waves of moving water." (Guo 2016, 698-699) The images in the mural of the Tomb of Wang Wen are believed to be dances of the Southern Dynasties related to "Bai Zhu Dancing."

Apart from the aforementioned dance moves, dancer sculptures with twisting and flighting movements were also unearthed from the Tomb of Ran Hua at Luoyang (Wang 1993, 414-425). It is speculated from the costumes and movements that the movements of these two dancer sculptures may be related to dances from the Western Regions such as the Hu Spinning Dance and the Hu Teng Dance.

#### 4. Yecheng of the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi Dynasties

In 534 AD, the Northern Wei split into the Eastern and the Western Wei. The capital of the Eastern Wei was in Yecheng, while the capital of the Western Wei was in Chang'an. Later on, the Northern Qi replaced the Eastern Wei and the Northern Zhou replaced the Western Wei before the Northern Zhou annihilated the Northern Qi. In 581 AD, Yang Jian usurped the Northern Zhou and changed the country's name to Sui. The whole process lasted 47 years. After the division of the Northern Wei, its music and dances were inherited by the Eastern and Western Wei. By comparing the relics related to dance culture in Yecheng and Chang'an, it can be seen that the dances of the Eastern Wei and Northern Qi were more developed than those of the Western Wei and Northern Zhou, most likely due to economic factors and

the emperors' personal preferences.

Yecheng is located north of Anyang, Henan Province, west of Linzhang County and south of Ci County, Hebei Province. In the area that was once the former city, a large number of relics related to dance culture from the Northern Dynasties, mostly sculptures, were discovered. A dance posture with high representativeness consists of the torso positioned upright, head faces forward, right leg stands straight, the left knee is raised as if stepping, the right elbow is bent with the right hand placed on the side of the abdomen, while the left hand is placed on the left knee (referred to as "Type C dance" in this study). Most of the dancers wear long dress with the left collar crossing over the right. This kind of dance is seen in the tombs of Princess Ruru (550 AD) of the Eastern Wei (Zhu 1984, 26-35), He Shaolong (568 AD) of the Northern Qi (Li and Yu 2013, 10-18), Madam Shusun (570 AD) of the Northern Qi, and Jia Bao (573 AD) of the Northern Qi (Henan Provincial Administration 2013, 31-95). Another dance move similar to Type C dance also involves raising one leg and touching the knee with one hand. The difference is that the arm on the same side as the upright leg is placed perpendicularly to the side of the body and the elbow is not bent (referred to as "Type D dance" in this study). This dance move is seen in the Tomb of Yao Zhao Huren (547 AD) of the Eastern Wei (Cixian 1977, 391-400) and Tomb 51 in Area II of the Gu'an Cemetery (late Eastern Wei Dynasty) of the Eastern Wei (Pan, Tao and Xue 2009, 49-59). Type D dance may be a variation of Type C dance.

Type C dance of Yecheng and Type B dance of the Luoyang period of the Northern Wei may have a certain inheritance relationship, as both the dances involve raising the knee and stepping. Moreover, in the Tomb of Yang Ji (533) of the Luoyang period of the Northern Wei, dancer sculptures presenting moves similar to Type C dance have emerged. From the *retir é* moves and small jumps of the four dancers depicted in the two mural tombs dated from the Pingcheng period of the Northern Wei, to Type B dance that involves touching the knee with both hands and stepping dated from the Luoyang period, and further, to the Type C and D dances that involve touching the knee with one hand and stepping, discovered in the Yecheng region of the Eastern Wei and Northern Qi, there is one common feature that is very obvious: although the dances of Luoyang and Yecheng inherited one of the nomads' traditions, that is, to leap while dancing, it can be seen from the dancers' costumes and performance styles that the dances had absorbed Han cultural factors, undergone refinement and miniaturization, and turned to a performance dominated by female dancers.

Moreover, the arm and the foot on the same side move simultaneously in Type C dance, and the posture is similar to what Chinese people usually call "*shunguai*" (moving the arm and foot on the same side). Today, the dance posture is mostly seen in the dances of the ethnic groups that reside in plateaus and mountains, including the Tibetan people, Qiang people, and Koreans in China, a posture that may have originated from their habit of flexing the muscles while walking or working in the mountains (Luo 2001, 225). Some of the contemporary dance moves of Koreans in China resemble Type C dance, except that the hand on the same side of the raised leg does not touch the knee but is stretched forward or raised. "*Old Book of Tang: Music Records*" mentioned that, "The music and dances from Goryeo and Baekje are known in the Liu Song dynasty. When the Northern Wei annihilated the Northern Yan, it also learned the music in an incomplete way." (Z. Liu 2000, 722) The records show that the music of Goryeo and Baekje had been introduced to the Northern Dynasties during the reign of Tuoba Tao, Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei. It is possible that "*shunguai*" of Type C dance is related to the Goguryeo culture.

On a yellow-glazed porcelain flask unearthed from the Tomb of Fan Cui (575 AD) of the Northern Qi, a dancer from the Western Regions dances on a lotus platform with the right hand stretched forward, the left hand drooped, the left knee raised (forming a posture similar to leaping) and the head turned to look back. Nearby, one person plays the flute, another claps the hands, another plays the pipa, and one more plays the cymbal (Yin 1993, 73). In the music and dance scene, the elements of the Western Regions and Buddhism are obvious, supported by the fact that the dance moves were also found on Buddhist statues unearthed in Beiwuzhuang of Yecheng. Some scholars believe that the dance is related to "Hu Teng Dance" originating from the state of Tashkent in Central Asia (Yuan 2004, 108). It is worth noting that the dancer in the center of the picture moves one leg and arm on the same side simultaneously, which is remarkably similar to the above-mentioned "*shunguai*" posture of the ethnic groups of the plateaus and mountains. This phenomenon appears to be due to the fact that the dance had absorbed the dance elements of the people of the western plateaus in the process of spreading to the inland through the Hexi Corridor.

In the Tomb of the Northern Dynasties in Wanzhang, Ci County (around 560 AD), the 13 dancer sculptures unearthed "mostly wear *longguan* (a cage-like hat that was popular in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties), vermilion cross-collar clothes with wide sleeves, and vermilion dresses tied at the waist" (Xu 1990, 601-607). The dancers dance lightly and gracefully. Additionally, there are small

holes on the hands of some of the sculptures, suggesting that they may have carried props such as *bianmians* (a kind of fan) or fly-whisks. The movements of these dancer sculptures look graceful, leisurely, elegant, and carry the style of Qingshang music and dances, which possibly came from the Southern Dynasties. The Tomb of the Northern Dynasties at Wanzhang is larger in scale and was designed to fit the specifications of an emperor's tomb (which is probably the tomb of Gao Yang, Emperor Wenxuan of the Northern Qi) (Jiang 1995, 13). The burial at this tomb occurred at the end of the Northern Dynasties, when the Xianbei people had been Sinicized to a higher level. Even as a tomb of an emperor of the Northern Dynasties, the dancer sculptures in the tombs carry the style of the Southern Dynasties. It can be inferred that the Han dance in the Southern Dynasties had become an indispensable part of the Northern Qi's court.

Furthermore, in the Tomb of Princess Ruru (550), some dancer sculptures appear in the images of shamanic dancers (Zhu and Tang 1984, 1-9), which shows that the primitive religious culture of the nomads was deeply rooted in the Northern Dynasties.

### 5. Chang'an of the Western Wei Dynasty and the Northern Zhou Dynasty

The Western Wei and the Northern Zhou, which were both established on the basis of the uprising by Xianbei nobles from six towns, had dance cultures that retained nomadic characteristics, just like those of the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi. Furthermore, since the Western Wei and the Northern Zhou were located in the Guanlong area with Chang'an as the core and were close to the Western Regions, it was more convenient for the dances from the Western Regions to be introduced. Historical records show that in 536 AD, "when Emperor Taizu served the Wei, the Gaochang Kingdom submitted to the state, so that the state received the musicians from Gaochang" (Z. Wei 2000, 230). In 568 AD, when Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou married Princess Ashina from the Ashina tribe of ancient Turkic peoples, "the representatives of the countries of the Western Regions escorted the bride, resulting in a large group of musicians from Kucha, Shule, Anguo, and Kangguo gathering in Chang'an" (Z. Liu 2000, 722). In general, the Hu style was more prominent in the dance of the Western Wei and Northern Zhou, but its overall influence was weaker than that of the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi, where a large number of musicians were "bestowed with official residences and hereditary titles" (Li 2000, 473-479). This can be confirmed by the number and types of dance relics unearthed.

Very few dancer sculptures and murals depicting music and dances were unearthed from the tombs of the Han people of the Western Wei and the Northern Zhou, as well as those of Xianbei people. However, a typical example is a dancer sculpture recovered from the Tomb of Ruogan Yun (578 AD) of the Northern Zhou, discovered in the northwestern suburb of Chang'an. The sculpture wears a Ru skirt with wide sleeves, the torso is upright, and the arms are drooped. The right leg is upright, and the left knee is raised to a horizontal position. The right hand seems to be lifting the edge of the skirt (referred to as Type E dance in this study) (Yin 1993, 64). The movements of the sculpture are similar to Type C and D dances. The movements also inherit the nomadic cultural traditions of the Xianbei tribe and are strongly related to Type B dance, as well as the *retir é* moves and small jumps of the four dancers on the tomb mural in Pingcheng. A unique feature of Type E dance is that the dancer's hands do not touch the knees and the knees are raised higher. It is conceivable that the position of the hands no longer restricts the raising of the legs, and the hands even lift the edge of the skirt to create a larger space for the lower limbs to move around, thus definitively enhancing the expressiveness of the dance. The Di and the Qiang people had lived together for a long time in the Guanlong area. The Yuwen group, which was not deeply affected by the Sinicization of the Northern Wei, fostered the culture of Xianbei further when it moved to the area (for example, the father of the owner of Tomb of Ruogan Yun once used the last name Wang, and Yuwen Tai bestowed on him a new last name Ruogan [Ying 1993, 73]). Therefore, on the basis of Type B dance, the changes of Type E dance in the Tomb of Ruogan Yun can be regarded as an enhancement of the nomadic dance style under dual influences, namely the policy guidance of the royal court and the local culture.

On the stone funerary couch unearthed from the Tomb of An Jia (579 AD) of the Northern Zhou, there are four music and dance images, with the dancers depicted all Hu people from the Western Regions. The first image is "Dance to the Music." In the picture, a dancer wears a red tight-fitting robe with a lapel and a pair of black leather boots. The dancer has one foot on the ground and seems to be jumping; the body is tilted to look back, the hip pointed to the left, hands held over the top of the head, with the body creating an "S shape." The accompaniment instruments include paixiao, konghou, and pipa. The second image is "Feast and Hunt with Music and Dance." The two dancers at the center of the picture also wear red tight-fitting robe, black pants, and black boots. They bow and bend their legs, throwing their sleeves

and dancing around the incense burner in the middle. The accompaniment instruments include konghou, flute, and pipa. The third image is “Feast and Dance to Music,” where the movements, costumes, and accompaniment instruments are roughly the same as that of the first image, “Dance to the Music.” The fourth image is also called “Feast and Dance to Music.” Here, a dancer wears red clothes and black leather boots and stands on one leg while bending and raising another leg; the head is tilted back while the arms are raised. As seen from the direction of the fluttering sleeves, the dancer seems to be doing a counterclockwise “inward lotus turn,” and is also making a “*liutou*” move (moving the body with the head facing the former direction) (Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology 2003, 25-83). There is also an image of “Feast and Dance to Music” in the Tomb of Master Shi (579 AD) of the Northern Zhou. The image was found in the relief on the north wall of the sarcophagus. The dancer’s left leg is bent and raised in a prancing posture, the body twisted and looking back, and the sleeves fluttered as if the arms are being waved up and down. The accompaniment instruments include konghou, pipa, bili, and xiyagou (Yang 2005, 4-33).

In the first and third music and dance images mentioned above, the “S shape” posture of the dancers likely originates from ancient Indian dances and is related to the reproduction worship of earlier religions. The earliest “S shape” dance relic from India that can be seen today is the sculpture of Yakshini, which appears on the fence of the Bharhut Buddhist stupa, dated 1st century BC. Yakshini was a goddess associated with the worship of the female reproductive system in ancient Indian folk beliefs, and was later included in Buddhist beliefs. Such an “S-shaped” posture can usually be seen in the murals and sculptures in the grotto temples located in India and on the route along which Buddhism spread to the east. Therefore, the dance posture was probably introduced to China at the same time as Buddhism. Judging from the alluring dances of the female dancers in the Chinese murals of the same or later periods, the connotation of reproduction worship or sexual temptation in the “S-shaped” posture originated from India appears to have been partially retained. Additionally, the dance of the “S-shaped” posture may also be related to the worship of snakes by the early South Asian peoples. On the one hand, a poisonous snake is an object of worship in primitive totemism, as people tried to gain supernatural power by imitating the snake’s “S-shaped” twisting. On the other, the worship of snakes is often associated with reproduction. For example, in the carvings around some pagodas in the period of the Shunga Empire, Yakshini, the goddess of fertility, often twists herself around a tree trunk like a snake. Snake worship was later assimilated into Hinduism and Buddhism. The Hindu god Shiva is decorated with snakes, while in Buddhism, snakes are the servants of Buddha (the Sanskrit word *Nāga* for this kind of snake is often translated as “dragon” in Chinese Buddhist scriptures). Serpentine dances therefore symbolize the service to the high-level Hindu or Buddhist deities. After all, the dance of the “S-shaped” posture had been transformed from a dance that represented reproduction worship among South Asian people and worship of totems to an entertaining dance dedicated to gods in later religions, and finally to a dance that purely serves the purpose of entertaining people when it was adopted by Sogdian people like An Jia, who believed in Zoroastrianism. This “S-shaped” dance, which involves twisting the body and sticking out the buttocks, has had a far-reaching influence. In the murals in the Tomb of Cui Fen (551 AD) of the Northern Qi, the dance had been integrated with the Long Sleeve Dance, a tradition of the Han people (Shandong Academy of Relics 2002, 4-20). The “S-shaped” dance is usually seen in murals, Buddhist statues, and pottery figurines in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, and traces of it have even appeared in the scene of “*Wang Wushan’s Liuyao Dance*” in the famous painting “*The Night Revels of Han Xizai*” of the Five Dynasties period.

Moreover, in the first and the third images of the Tomb of An Jia, the movement in which the dancers hold their hands over the tops of their heads, also carries Indian characteristics. The movement comes from a ritualistic dance in ancient Indian religions, and is also a movement for religious practices such as yoga. In today’s Bharatanatyam dance of India, some traces of the movement still remain. The owner of the Tomb of An Jia, a Sogdian who served as a *Sabao* in the Northern Zhou, was responsible for the management of Persian merchants and Zoroastrianism sacrifices and rituals. Therefore, the religious elements in ancient Indian dance moves in the images of music and dances in the Tomb of An Jia were probably weakened, while the sensation and entertainment colors of the moves were strengthened or even mixed with some elements of Persian culture. The dance move had also appeared in the relics of the same period, including the music and dance image engraved on the stone Buddha seat of the Northern Zhou in the Maoling of Shaanxi, Cave 297 of Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, and even the brick carving in the Xiuding Temple of the Tang Dynasty in Anyang. The occasions are all related to Buddhism, which indicates that the religious meaning has not faded completely in the process of dissemination. It is worth mentioning that in the aforementioned image on the stone Buddha seat of the Northern Zhou in the Maoling, the Hu dancer performs around an incense burner along with a female dancer who wears a Han wide-sleeved costume, dancing on music played by the same band. It shows that the dance integrated the

music and dances of the Han people.

In the fourth image of the Tomb of An Jia (the “Feast and Dance to Music”), the dancer swings the sleeves and rotates, a movement that may be the “Hu Spinning Dance” recorded in the *“Old Book of Tang.”* The dance came from Kangguo, near modern day Samarkand, Uzbekistan (Z. Liu 2000, 254). When Ashina, the Turkic Princess married Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou in 568 AD, she brought with her the music of Kanggou, and the time was before the burial of An Jia (579 AD). Concerning earlier sources of the dance, Sachs (2014, 31) believed that “all countries along the Mediterranean Sea and the Asian countries that surround the region seemed to have spinning dances” and “female dancers of Turkestan had brought spinning dances to China.” The spinning dance of the Sufi Muslims in present day Turkey and the Sama dance of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China may also be related to the Hu Spinning Dance. Some scholars believe that this type of dance has inherited the features of primitive shamanism (Liu, Zang and Wu 2009, 208).

## 6. Further Discourse



In the two hundred years of the Northern Dynasties, starting from the restoration of the state by Tuoba Gui, Emperor Daowu of Northern Wei in 386 AD, until the annihilation of the Northern Zhou in 581 AD, the change of dance forms was a process of struggle, interaction, and integration of various cultural factors. In the Shengle and Pingcheng periods of the Northern Wei, Xianbei’s Tuoba Tribe entered the areas traditionally occupied by the Han people as a conqueror, showing a strong momentum in the rise of music and dance culture. Therefore, the dances at that time integrated many of the elements from Xianbei’s nomadic culture, leading to a phenomenon in which “Qingshang Music was not circulated among the local areas, and the people followed their respective habits” (Z. Liu 2000, 701). During the Luoyang period, the Northern Wei took the initiative to Sinicize, and absorbed much of Han music and dances as it overpowered the Southern Dynasties. At the same time, the Northern Wei engaged in extensive exchange with the Western Regions, transforming Luoyang into an international city where the cultures of various countries and ethnic groups intersected. Therefore, various styles of dances could be seen in the dance of Luoyang, including the southern dances shown in the mural of the Tomb of Wang Wen; Type A dance, which contains Indian elements; Type B dance, which includes nomadic elements; and Hu dances of the Western Regions shown in the Tomb of Ran Hua. Collectively they create a hub where diverse cultures meet in one location. During the Eastern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Qi, and Northern Zhou Dynasties, owing to the variation in cultural strategies and economic conditions of the rulers of the Eastern and Western regimes, the scenes of dances in the states were somewhat different. In comparison, the music and dances of the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi were more prosperous. Trends of anti-Sinicization had emerged in the Eastern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Qi, and Northern Zhou (Chen 2003, 544-596). In the context of culture, the Hu style prevailed, as reflected in the yellow-glazed porcelain flask in the Tomb of Fan Cui of the Northern Qi, the stone funerary couch in the Tomb of An Jia of the Northern Zhou, and the Hu dance shown on the sarcophagus in the Tomb of Master Shi. As the conquest of the Southern Dynasties pushed forward, the eastern and then western regimes continued to absorb the elements of Han dance. Additionally, various cultural factors gathered during the Shengle, Pingcheng, and Luoyang periods of the Northern Wei Dynasty had accreted and been enriched during the period. These factors include the primitive religious factors represented by shamanistic dancer sculptures in the Tomb of Princess Ruru of the Eastern Wei, the cultural factors of Goguryeo and the people of the western plateaus represented by the “*shunguai*” posture of Type C dance of the dancer sculptures in Yecheng, the cultural factors of the Western Regions represented by the dance on the yellow-glazed porcelain flask in the Tomb of Fan Cui, and the Indian cultural factors represented by the “S-shaped” dance on the reliefs of the funerary couch in the Tomb of An Jia of the Northern Zhou.



The dance cultural factors of different ethnic groups and different regions in the Northern Dynasties were not completely exclusive. For example, the worship of bird totems and the dance movements derived from it are not unique to the Xianbei people, but widely exist across various ethnic groups and regions surrounding the Han people in the Central Plains. The Northeast ethnic groups and the “Huaiyi” residing in the Bohai Rim of ancient China also worshipped bird totems, and this was manifested in dances. In a poem depicting a Goguryeo dance, Li Bai, the poet of the Tang Dynasty wrote, “Dancing with wide sleeves, like birds coming from the east of the sea” (Li 1977, 345). In modern Korean dance in China, all kinds of movements that mimic the acts of cranes can still be seen. The Qingshang music and dances that were disseminated from the Southern Dynasties to the Northern Dynasties also contained “bird-like” movements. For example, some of the movements in “Bai Zhu Dancing” were described as “raising both hands like swans flying” and “raising both sleeves like luans and phoenixes flying” (Guo 2016, 697). The Kazakhs in Xinjiang, who are the descendants of Wusun and Turkic peoples living in the ancient



Western Regions, also have a dance called “Swan Dance” that mimics birds flapping their wings (Luo 2001, 194). As another example, the spinning movements originating from shamanism can also be seen in the dances of the nomads in northeastern and northern China, as well as those of the ethnic groups of the Western Regions. The “*shuanguai*” posture, which emerged due to regional conditions, exists in both the dances of the Korean Peninsula and ethnic groups inhabiting the western plateaus. It can be seen that a certain degree of commonality exists between the dance cultures of different regions and ethnic groups, the root of which lies in the similarity in the psychological and physiological structures of human beings. Faced with similar natural and social environments, early humans would naturally create similar dance languages. It is precisely because of this commonality of humans that the possibility of dialogue, interaction, and integration between different ethnic groups and regions arises (Fu 2002, 4).

The integration of the dance cultures of grassland ethnic groups of the Northern Dynasties, the ethnic groups in the Western Regions, and the Han ethnic group in the South was not simply a result of splicing, but rather a process of activating the hidden factors in the dance of the Han people, forming a “resonance,” that ultimately created new qualities. Dance scholar Yu Ping believes that there are two “logical starting

points” for the origins of Han dance. The first is the human movement of “” that manifests “dance with waving sleeves,” which represents the farming cultures of the Yin-Shang, Dongyi, and Baiyue tribes. The second is the human movement of “” that manifests “dance with stretching arms and bending shins,” which represents the nomadic culture of the Di and Qiang tribes. Both of these movements have connotations related to primitive totems and witchcraft (Yu 1992, 21-43). In the subsequent development

in history, “” that manifested dancing with props in both hands was continuously strengthened, while the cultural factors of bare hands and bending shins of the nomads, as well as connotations related to totems and witchcraft were weakened. “*Rites of Zhou: Offices of Spring*” recorded that for the six “minor dances” that the scions of aristocratic families practiced, except for “human dance,” all dances involved holding props in hands (Rites of Zho 2014, 487). The unearthed brick carvings and murals of the Han Dynasty also show that the majority of the dances in the Han Dynasty involve handheld props. The extensive use of dance props during the Zhou dynasty and the Han Dynasty clarified and put the meaning of dance in order. Just as the classical studies of the Han Dynasty incorporated all things of heaven and earth into an orderly frame of time and space, the use of dance props had, to a certain extent, also incorporated the dance moves, dance spaces, and even the dancers themselves into a system of meaning and provided an opportunity for dances to be formalized. As the nomads took over the Central Plains during the Northern Dynasties, they ended the process of formalization, removed the constraints of props imposed on the meaning, and replaced them with their “stretching movements,” including leaping of the lower limbs, the eccentric spinning used in shamanistic dance, “*shunguai*” movements of the people of the plateaus and mountains, and the “S-shaped” dance that represents reproduction worship and totem worship in ancient India. The “” human movement that appeared in early dances of the Han people and other primitive dance factors seem to have been reactivated. Without the constraints of props, the dancers’ gestures and rhythms, as well as the movements of the torso would have definitely been intensely enriched. However, it was necessary for the rulers of the Northern Dynasties to absorb and accept the Han culture to secure legitimacy in ruling the Central Plains. With the deepening of cultural exchanges between the North and South, Han dance props such as scarves, sleeves, and fly-whisks gradually came to be valued by the rulers of the Northern Dynasties. During the interaction and integration with the dance cultures of various ethnic groups from the North and West, the traditional dance culture of the Han people in the Central Plains had, on the one hand, gained more vocabularies of movement and activated the resources of the bodies and culture in itself, which were full of vitality. On the other hand, the position of various ethnic dances in the Liyue system was adjusted from the perspectives of concept and system. The continuous incorporation, fusion, and innovations were the prelude to the prosperous age of music and dances in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, and heralded the coming of a new era of art, which was cultivating.

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